

WELCOME!

GROUPE FORUM – February 27, 2007

Introductions by Jeff Blair, Luiz Barbieri, Julie Morris, Roy Crabtree

Objectives:

1. To open up a dialogue between the constituents/stakeholders with the agencies that manage the Gulf of Mexico fishery resources.
2. To understand and clarify the processes involved in managing the resource.

Overview of the agenda, presentations, and panelists at this meeting.

Ground rules and role of the facilitators at this meeting.

Clarification of regulatory process and mandates: Why and how a regulation becomes a regulation

Federal Regulatory Process and Mandates

Mike McLemore, NOAA General Counsel, Southeast Region

National standards: To prevent overfishing; plus 9 other standards to meet

Public participation in the process

Secretarial FMPs/amendments

Additional rulemaking authority – emergency and temporary rulemaking authority

Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act – Key provisions

Role of Gulf Council in the Federal Regulatory Process

Rick Leard, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

One of eight regional councils created by Magnuson-Stevens Act

17 voting members, 4 non-voting members

Meets 5 times per year, last 4-5 days

Two public comment periods – regarding specific agenda items, open for any items

FMPs – types of Council Actions: amendments, regulatory amendments, interim rules, emergency rules

How to decide which fish to manage?

Is it significant, is there a perceived problem, increase in catches, stock assessment need?

When to amend an FMP? Catches exceed allowable levels, new information on stock status (SEDAR), Magnuson-Stevens Act mandates, need for administrative changes

When does the public get involved?

Determination of problem or need, scoping document prepared, options paper, draft amendment with preferred alternatives selected, public hearings, final public hearing/final action, transmittal to NMFS

Panels and Committees – SSC, special SSCs, SEP, SAP, APs, special APs, workgroups, etc.

Representatives include scientists from state and federal agencies, universities, constituents, NGOs, and members of the public

State Regulatory Processes

Mark Robson, FWC Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Creation of the FWC

7 members appointed by the governor – 5 year terms

Authority to regulate fish and wildlife in state waters (3 miles on the Atlantic, 9 miles on the Gulf).

All license fees for taking wild animal life, freshwater and saltwater – must go to the legislature for permission

Workplan – level of priorities, schedule deliverables

Rulemaking – issues generated internally or by the public, public input through workshops, agency contact, surveys, etc.

Draft rule – first public hearing

Final rule – last public hearing

State/Federal Coordination

Bill Teehan, FWC Division of Marine Fisheries Management

The FWC interacts with the GMFMC, the SAFMC, ASMFC, GSMFC, and NOAA Fisheries
Co-managed fisheries – spiny lobster, stone crabs

Coordination through: Data collection, voting members, participation on scientific panels and stock assessments, review rules for state rule consistency and with the coastal zone management act.

March 2006 – one red grouper bag limit was consistent with the CZMA

Postponed gag grouper determination until the assessment was accomplished

Question and Answer Session

Q: Will there be an advisory panel for Amendment 30 and how can I volunteer?

The council will be re-appointing its advisory panel and SSC members at the March meeting.

The Gulf Council web site has links to the paperwork for applying to these panels.

Q: What is the regulatory impact of the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization guidelines? Are the guidelines the law or how we interpret the Act?

The Guidelines interpret the national standards.

We are going to have scoping meetings on the changes to the MSA.

Scoping meetings at the March meeting, still finalizing the agenda, probably ready by March 1.

Q: The scoping for Amendment 30 – will the scoping options and public input be ready for the council meeting?

The scoping document has been posted on the Council website. The final report on red grouper will be ready soon. The scoping process is just the beginning, and the council may take one to several meetings to develop options for amendments. The council has 1 year to develop amendments and submit to NMFS if a determination is made that a stock is overfished or undergoing overfishing.

Q: What are the practical implications to the recreational and commercial fishing industry of the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act?

To some extent, the agency is still sorting this out. Annual catch limits may be proposed. These haven't been done yet. MSA requires that overfishing must be ended immediately.

Q: The National Academy of Science gave a roadmap to improving the recreational survey. What is being done and how can stakeholders be involved in this process?

The MSA specifies a timeline of 24 months to get the new survey methods in place. There have been planning meetings. The GSMFC is conducting a pilot survey using an Angler License Directory to be used in place of the RDD, which is part of the NAS recommendations.

Q: The new angler license directory – Are the inshore fishermen going to be asked the same type of questions that offshore fishers are asked?

Still to be determined. The state license data are being used to develop the license frames.

Q: What percentage of recreational survey data is going to be used to manage the grouper fishery?

The new methods should give us better information on who is fishing in state and federal waters and how much they are catching.

Q: Does the regulatory process and MSA take into account loss of habitat, hurricanes, and other impacts?

Yes.

Q: Are we using real science to determine if a fishery is overfished versus surveys which are skewed and scientists that want to bias the results one way or the other?

(Deferred to later)

Q: Which agencies are involved in managing state waters and habitats?

The DEP, water management districts, DCA (growth management), and others. The FWC doesn't have a direct regulatory role, but we partner with other agencies.

Q: What are the benchmarks used for our stock assessments? Do we have new benchmarks?

Under MSA, we have to rebuild to MSY.

Q: Will we have to set a hard TAC on each species managed by 2010?

Accountability measures will have to be set prior to setting the TACs.

Q: Under MSA, it was stated that annual catch limits have to be set. How will these limits be applied to recreational and commercial fisheries?

The councils will implement these limits and depend upon the assessments, public input, and deliberations during the rule-making process.

Q: The SEDAR process – the last step is the review process. Who created the Center for Independent Experts?

The SEFSC has used the CIE to review the results from the SEDAR process. Will have to check on who actually created the CIE. [It's run out of the University of Miami.]

Q: How can we avoid regulations that conflict between state and federal waters?

Ultimately, it came down to the FWC commission members not having enough information to make a judgment on whether it was reasonable to act on the closure in state waters for gag, red, and black grouper. We strive to be consistent, but we are able to be a little more deliberative in the process and want to make sure the resource is protected.

Q: What keeps the council from allying with Florida regulations for fish which are primarily caught in Florida waters?

Nothing. The MSA requires the council to manage throughout the entire range of the species.

Stock (population) assessments & the science

How/what data are collected for grouper management?

Richard Cody, FWC

Steve Turner, NOAA Fisheries SEFSC

State and federal collaborative effort

Federal – Commercial data collection

SEFSC – TIP, Logbooks, Observers

State – Trip tickets, TIP

Recreational – NOAA Fisheries headboat log books

State – NOAA Fisheries MRFSS

FIN Fishery dependent

Pilot at-sea sampling

Head boat log books

MRFSS –

Angler participation is voluntary

System of Surveys – shore and private boat modes

Effort: RDD for shore and private boat

Charter-guide boat mode – For-Hire Telephone Survey

MRFSS Field Intercept – catch

Mode, area, numbers, disp of released fish, numbers of harvested fish

Size of kept fish, species targeted

MRFSS FHTS - # fishing trips, date, length, area, etc.

MRFSS – 1981-present

State of Florida participation since 1998

40-46K angler trips intercepted

Over 200+ fish species identified

Biological sampling – focus on FIN priority species; rec gag and red grouper targets set in 2007

NOAA Fisheries head boat log book program – participation required for permitting

Dockside sampling

Pilot at-sea sampling started in 2005

>560 trips sampled in 2005-2006

Collecting information on size of discarded catch

Marine Fisheries trip tickets – mandatory since 1985

About 1,100 dealers, 224K trip tickets annually

TIP – Trip Interview Program

Collect catch, effort, size, age structures, 2005-2006 – interviewed about 2,700 trips, 110,000 fish measured each year, about 30,000 otoliths, about 9,000 from groupers in the Gulf of Mexico

SEFSC Log book program

Participation required for permitted vessels since 1990; pounds sold by species, amount of gear used, areas fished, depth fished, etc.

About 2,000 vessels annually, 37,000 trips annually

Critical for developing catch rates for stock assessments

Discard logbook program – a random sample of vessels participate (since 2001); report a limited set of information: start date, numbers discarded by species, reason for discard, area fished, etc.

Last 2 years – about 300 vessels, 3,100 trips annually, about 130,000 fish discarded, about 43,000 grouper discarded annually

Shark observer program – 4% coverage of trips; in place since 1994; 26 vessels sampled, 49 trips, 148 sea days

Shark directed trips in Gulf of Mexico: 32 species, 27 not sharks or rays, 14 groupers out of about 2,000 animals total

Reef Fish Observer Program (Pilot) begun mid-last year; 392 sea days sampled, 268 bandit rig sea days, 100 long line sea days

How is the Status of Groupers Determined? **Clay Porch, NOAA Fisheries, SEFSC**

The SEDAR process:

Improve the quality, reliability, and relevance of stock assessments

Improve the confidence in the results of the assessments

Participants: fishermen, NGOs, state marine fisheries agencies, university researchers, council/commission staff and advisors, CIE, Federal scientists, other interested parties

3 workshops over a period of 6-9 months – data workshop, assessment workshop, and review workshop

Data workshop – identify and review best available data for assessment

Assessment workshop – develop and select preferred assessment models; evaluate model's uncertainty

Review workshop – evaluate the adequacy and appropriateness of input data, modeling techniques, and assumptions

SSC's role in SEDAR: review assessment results, determine adequacy for management, and bring results to the Council

Revisiting Gag and Red Grouper Assessments through SEDAR: Two review panels – three grouper stocks. Different decisions were made in some aspects on discarded fish, increasing effectiveness of fishing fleets, natural mortality, definitions of overfishing. The SEDAR steering committee decided to form an ad hoc technical committee to review the technical details of the three assessments and recommend additional analyses if necessary. A new Review Panel will review these findings.

Question and Answer Session

Q: When log books are filled out, there are some things in these logs that are not well represented by the log book such as the area fished and weather conditions. How valid are data on discards, area fished, and etc.? And, isn't there a way to simplify the reporting to state and federal agencies?

We need more detailed information on the actual area fished for stock assessments. An electronic log book would be ideal, but discussions with fishermen and scientists need to happen to figure out how this can be done well. Discards – the data are “generalizations” – and data may not be collected under ideal conditions. These data are critical for assessments. There should be a way to simplify the collecting of log book and trip ticket data. The observer program will also provide valuable discard information in addition to what is being collected from the discard log books.

Q: 10% sample of the recreational for-hire survey – how do you know how many charter boats were fishing offshore? And, how do you verify the number of trips taken?

The average is that a vessel is called 3 times annually, up to 8 times per year. This is also an issue that is being addressed in the MRFSS re-design. There are about 2,000 vessels in the vessel directory.

The Coastal Household Telephone Survey is used to randomly sample households for fishing activity.

The telephone calls to these households sample anglers and obtain the number of fishing trips taken. The angler license directory has information from saltwater fishing license holders, of which about 1/3 have a listed telephone numbers.

Q: How was the estimate of captain and crew reduction for red grouper calculated?

(Deferred to tomorrow)

Q: Fishermen are skeptical of the NOAA Fisheries Service. Why are the SEDAR results for groupers going to be reviewed, but not vermilion snapper or red snapper?

The SEDAR steering committee intended not to open up every previous stock assessment. With vermilion snapper, additional data were collected which removed some of the uncertainty with the previous assessments. With the red and gag grouper assessments, the decisions made by the different groups may have influenced the direction of the assessments, so it was prudent to reconsider both of these assessments.

Q: How does the data workshop participants decide which data to accept and use for the assessments?

Part of the time is used to determine which data are available and whether the data set represents the species throughout its range or just in a smaller part of its range.

Q: The observer program – why were there differences in the number of sea days for the different gears and how do we get 100% observer coverage on these boats?

The allocation of observer effort is made by looking at the number of vessel days at sea for each of the gear types, and trips are randomly assigned to the selected vessels. This is a pilot survey. In the future, we may adjust the amount of time spent on each of the types of vessels sampled.

Q: The head boat log books – why couldn't you extend an online daily log to all recreational anglers? Also, why couldn't you work with recreational fishing clubs to get more data?

The survey in place is stratified in certain ways. We are looking at panel-type surveys to collect additional information and to get interested anglers involved. This was also recommended by the NRC review.

Q: How do you define discards recreationally and commercially? The amounts noted as commercial discards seem low.

The trips noted were on all observed trips, not just trips where you would likely be catching groupers. A discard is a fish released from a boat, alive or dead (also self-reported). From the commercial log books which are self-reported, it is probably the same. The head boat at-sea sampling does look at the disposition (live or dead) of the fish that are observed and released from head boats.

Update on recent grouper assessments

Gag Grouper

Mauricio Ortiz, NOAA Fisheries, SEFSC

Data used in assessments – biological information, catch data

Biological information: Growth, reproduction, natural mortality, discard mortality, recruitment

Catch data: Commercial catch and discards (back to 1963), recreational catch and discards (back to 1981). A long time series is useful to look at the stock at times when they were less exploited.

Trends in abundance to develop indices

Fishery independent (visual surveys, video surveys)

Fishery dependent (MRFSS, head boat, long line commercial, bandit commercial)

Recreating the dynamics of the population in the assessments. The catch data and indices are modeled to examine trends in fishing mortality.

Spawning stock biomass – abundance has increased since the early 1990's; four strong year classes of fish in last 15 years have entered the fishery helping to increase abundance.

Key improvements to the assessments:

- Updated assessment models for growth patterns by area/time, effects of minimum size limits, historical catch data.
- Correlated aging methods
- Included new information on discard mortality, how discard mortality changes with depth, and increased sample size for age from major fisheries.

Key areas to improve in future assessments

- Size of discards in recreational fishery
- Estimates of discards (commercial fishery)
- Influence of sex ratio (male to female) on reproduction
- Contributions and removal from other stocks and fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico (Campeche Banks)
- Number of eggs females produce at different ages/sizes

How can fishermen help?

- Provide discard data
- Collaborate with scientists through cooperative research programs
- Help scientists understand changes in fishing efficiency

Red Grouper

Shannon Calay, NOAA Fisheries, SEFSC

3 workshops

Biological information

- Growth, age composition
- Reproduction
- Natural mortality
- Discard mortality (not enough depth-related information to incorporate in the models except as fixed ratios)

Catch data – commercial catch (log books, discards from log books and observers)

Recreational – catch (MRFSS and head boat), discards from NMFS

Fisheries independent – SEAMAP video survey

Fisheries dependent – MRFSS, head boat 18”, head boat 20” size limits, commercial long line and commercial hand line data

2 strong year classes in the last decade have entered the fishery helping to increase abundance.

Harvest rates are sustainable – overfishing is not occurring. The FMP management goal (OY) is lower, and we appear to be at that goal in 2004.

Amount of fish in water is sufficient to sustain fishery over long-term – stock is not overfished (recovered).

Key improvements to assessment

2002 – recommendations to improve the number of age samples, compare modeled information on age of catch with direct observations

There were important differences

The large number of age samples taken after that assessment allowed the comparison with direct observations

A new growth function was derived

Cooperative data collection programs will provide important new data for the next assessment

Obtain samples for biological analyses

Expand fisheries independent information

Discard estimates need improvement

Release mortality needs improvement

Identify historical changes in catch efficiency

Question and Answer Session

Q: The methods of deriving the recreational and commercial catches are different. Why do we need a survey for one and a census for another? Can information from a census and a survey be compared?

With a survey, you end up with an estimate. We do collect the size and weight of individual fish. We would like to see more of these data, and it is limited by sampling protocols and cooperation of the anglers. We're trying to collect more age samples from recreational fish, too.

Q: How sensitive are the assessments to the variability in the data and assumptions used in the models?

Part of the SEDAR process is an assessment of the uncertainty in the results. The model is sensitive to discard mortality and to the catchability of the species. The base model uncertainty is running around 10%, but some of the components are higher in uncertainty than others.

Q: With the contradictory findings of the recent grouper assessments, how confident are you with the discard estimates from the latest gag assessment?

The total number of discards is one of the weakest parts of the assessment. At this point, it is the best estimate available, and we would prefer to have better estimates in the future.

Q: Have red grouper not been overfished since 1995?

The base model shows this result.

Q: Why have recreational and commercial fishers been so restricted in catches since 1995 if this is the case?

(Deferred to tomorrow)

And, the models have evolved over time which led to better prediction on the level of fishing mortality.

Q: Why can't you sell a recreational stamp for fish caught recreationally that would give you better information on catches?

(Deferred to tomorrow)

Q: The lag time between the collection of data and the review – SEDAR 10 ended in 2004, and SEDAR 12 ended in 2005. The assessments are way behind the current year. Should projections be included in the assessments as an aid to the council for their decisions?

Yes. But, you have to make assumptions on the level of fishing mortality and other factors in the models. As the data are gathered, the model predictions could be examined with the new data

gathered. And, projections are part of the models to examine the time it may take for a population to recover from being overfished or from overfishing.

Q: How does the MSA reauthorization affect the technical aspects for collecting the data and conducting the assessments?

From the data side, a lot more work will be required for both recreational and commercial data collection programs. The assessment side will be affected because of the requirement for catch limits for species which haven't been assessed previously.

Q: Is recruitment ecologically or biologically driven?

Recruitment estimates are made by trying to correlate recruitment with the spawning stock. Often, these relationships are not well-correlated. The projections incorporate or try to incorporate the uncertainty in recruitment – we know that there is a lot of uncertainty in the spawner-recruit relationship.

Q: Is new technology being used to estimate population stocks better?

We would prefer to work with fisheries independent data rather than the catch data. However, it is more costly, which is the main restriction.

Q: In the gag assessment, the SEAMAP video survey was used as one of the indices. Visual surveys have been on-going in the Keys and there are many ideas being proposed to come up with better indices to develop fisheries independent data to improve assessments.

Q: Were the observer data showing an average of 14 fish per trip used in the grouper assessments?

There was an extensive review of the data for red grouper discards in the discard log books. The shark directed effort discards were not used to estimate discards in the grouper fishery. The information presented was only used in this presentation to show that there was very little discard of grouper from the shark directed fishery.

Q: How will we be able to provide better data on discards in the future? How will the catches from charter boats be weighted against a “regular” recreational angler?

The recreational survey collects data on charter boats, private boat anglers, and shore anglers separately. The catch and release estimates are made separately and are weighted by the estimated number of trips in each mode of fishing.

The information on discarded fish needs to be improved, and that is part of the NRC recommendations. Also, discards from the commercial fishery are also important for future assessments. The information from the commercial observer program and the head boat at-sea programs need to be evaluated.

Q: Why is there a different size limit for recreational and commercial fishers for red snapper and red grouper?

The proportion of undersized animals in each of the sectors is different, and this has a lot to do with the differing size limits for the different sectors of the fishery.

Q: How is essential fish habitat factored into assessments, and how are unwise fishing practices in the Caribbean which may affect recruitment to Gulf of Mexico waters factored into assessments?

We need to work with other countries to reduce fishing mortality in the Gulf and the Caribbean. We don't have a reliable estimate of their catches and catch rates over time on the Campeche Banks. No information on gag habitat was included in the gag assessment.

In the SEDAR process, we have a list of terms to address – and this includes essential fish habitat. There have been discussions on EFH, but few reliable data to work with in the data and assessment workshops. As more information becomes available, we may be able to work these data into the assessments. There is no baseline with which to compare changes in EFH over time.

Note-taker: Joe O'hop, FWC



WELCOME!

GROUPE FORUM – February 28, 2007

Factors Influencing Grouper Management Decisions

Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries

Stu Kennedy, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Economics 101: Using Economics for Management Decisions

Brad Gentner, NOAA Fisheries

Question and Answer Session

Q: In the panhandle, dramatic change in the predator/prey situation, How is the change in predator/prey factored in management decisions?

In terms of bycatch and release mortality rates, the studies may/may not involve predatory factors, if so it's factored in. Size limits up/down determine the effect of the change and the resulting net benefit.

In red grouper, the predatory factor was included.

Q: Red grouper - will there be a change in the February 15 – March 15 closure for 2008?

Reef Fish Amend 30 includes both red and gag grouper and the final report on red grouper will be included, so how the mix of the red grouper and gag grouper will be included is unknown.

Q: Multispecies catches at the same time?

Both species come in on the same trip, although targeted separately, bycatch of one will affect the other.

Q: Economics - the 30 day mandatory closure had a major affect on the 4 fish houses in Pasco county, as does the imports. Do not see protection for the small businesses who are trying to adhere to the law.

Trade is managed by dept of agriculture but not under fisheries.

If the proposed regulations are onerous, then speak-up during public hearing process to point that out.

There is a lack of data on processors/wholesalers to evaluate the impacts of fishing regulations.

Q: Economics - dockside value of commercial grouper, the adverse economic impact of closing for August was 170-210 million. A request was made for meetings on the economic impacts of

closures, but only one has been held. What is the response? Will there be an evaluation of the commercial and recreational grouper fishery value and a reassessment of allocation?

The SEP is working cooperatively with SEFSC to make a proper economic evaluation decision. A status report will be provided at the March Gulf council meeting. The SEP is meeting in early May with a follow-up report to the council at the June meeting.

Q: Under the new MSA, catch limits must be implemented. Will there be hard TAC on the groupers in the shallow water complex – if one TAC is captured will the other shallow water species be shut down?

Cannot be determined; the annual catch limits could be in aggregate, and not necessarily by one species.

Q: Under new MSA, why is it that NMFS isn't very clear to legislators explaining the impacts of mandates?

NMFS doesn't have control over what Congress does in session.

Q: Economic value vs economic impact - majority of Floridians are consumers of seafood, how is the economic value figured in the process.

Com: the value is added to the fishermen's, wholesaler's value; rec: the value of expenditures for the fishing trips (needs further explanation)

Q: Where is the most recent economic data available?

It is available on the NMFS website

Figures for total value are desired, but due to data difficulties and workload issues that information is not as readily available. None of that information exists for the commercial fisheries. The total value information does not include the Texas data.

Q: Data poor decisions impact millions of people and the gulf region. How can the Council be comfortable with decisions when data is lacking? How can the fishermen feel comfortable with the process when their suggestions and comments are ignored? The fishermen feel they pay the price of not having the data and the decisions made.

The best available data is reviewed and provided to the Council and the decisions must be made based on that data regardless.

Q: Closures are not the answer and cause a hardship on the fishermen and their families. Reduced bag limits would be more desired. Customers want to catch groupers. The fish go to deep waters to spawn, 100 feet. Based on the new red grouper stock assessment, and when they were done, the closed season was not needed.

Q: How practical are the size increases when there is a higher level of discards? Based on boat ramp surveys there is no way to determine how many fish are in the waters. There is a 10:1 ratio of catch on the smaller fish when size limits are increased.

From the standpoint of the major fisheries that have been managed for a long time, the size limits have been pushed to the maximum limits. They are evaluating the effects of lowering size limits for grouper and will be included in Am. 30 scoping document. Size of maturity is important when setting size limits.

Q: Suggests giving the recreational fishermen a poundage limit rather than size limits, bag limits, and season closures. The dock observers can then report the statistics on the size and types of fish.

This idea has not been discussed at the council level yet. The implications have not been addressed. It's an interesting concept that should be explored further.

Next Steps for Grouper

Stu Kennedy, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Open Forum Discussion

What can be done to maximize the value of public comment opportunities?

- Timing of public input – sometimes too late in the process to be of value. Attendees are operating a business or working and it is costly to attend meetings, their time needs to be considered.
- Many fishermen do not have computers or strong on-line research skills. Send out a one-page notice to the fishermen announcing the availability of the documents and allow them to request a hard copy. Make documents available clearly on the web site.
- It would be helpful to disseminate the information to the fishermen in more time before the meetings. Perception is a critical element of the fishery process. The public perceives that the delay in material may be deliberate.
- Hold public hearing type meetings at the docks in addition to the typical meeting locations. Fishermen believe that their comments at public hearings are not being considered fairly. Better outreach needs to be done to involve fishermen in the process.
- Listen to the comments of the attendees before making decisions. At some meetings it does not appear that the public is being listened to.
- Group representatives be provided more time to present comments of their members, say 15 minutes while individuals receive 5 minutes. This would provide more focused comments and reduce the number of persons speaking and repeating the same sentiments.
- Port agents should be consulted in the process since they are good liaisons between the fishermen, scientists and the regulators.
- Establish a fund to provide paid advertising of meetings or public service announcements.
- Hold forum via a television broadcast. Take questions in advance and then answer those questions on TV so all would be able to access the meeting.
- Only present data related to the subject matter (species) at hand.
- Build a statistical base of comments received in large volumes and not discount public input.

- A little more publicity would encourage fishermen to provide more information. Many don't feel it does any good to provide the information since they don't see the results of that information being used.

What can be done to improve public understanding of the regulatory process, stock assessments, and management?

- Use the TV and cable media to disseminate information about meetings.
- Present in press releases the good/bad impacts of the meeting in plain language to encourage persons to attend the meetings to address their concerns.
- Use guest speakers on the Mel Berman show, radio stations to reach the recreational and commercial fishermen.
- Present the information on a simplified level for the fishermen to understand.
- Alabama Sea Grant publication – Fisheries Management for Fishermen.
- Have a NOAA/NMFS and or Council booth at the Frank Sargent show, or other fishery related events like boat shows.
- Council document – Navigating the Council Process answers most questions. Give consideration to the number of people attending meetings.

What can be done to better communicate technical and scientific information?

- Advise fishermen of ways they can encourage more funding for research.
- It is essential that the commercial fishing community understand the MSA changes, and what they need to do to make the industry successful and sustainable.
- Use people who are skilled at explaining the scientific information on a simplified level, perhaps teachers.
- Listen to all information gathered (more)

What can fishery management agencies do to strengthen their relationship with constituents?

- Regulators should acknowledge that the fishermen's comments/information was correct and then the regulations should be returned to the status before changes were made on incorrect information.
- Establish fishing trips with regulators and fishermen to observe how the process of fishing actually works.
- The perception needs to be changed that the persons speaking at council meetings are not being listened to. They are spending their time and money to be present and should be given consideration. Allow group representatives to have more time to present their group's views.
- Perceived lack of trust in the data by all parties.
- Persons in authority over fishermen should be held accountable for their actions and receive a consequence for breaking the laws/regulations and for breaking that trust.
- Restrictions that are imposed are never relaxed, and restrictions that are no longer needed should be removed.
- Need more on-the-water observations and knowledge to manage fisheries.
- Flawed or incomplete data is being used to manage fisheries.
- In the past when mistakes are made by NMFS there is no real acknowledgement of the mistakes.

Panel Discussion

- Access to or accessibility of existing comment opportunities
 - Accessibility of public hearings with one council member and one council staff member
 - Most people cannot take a day off, especially to be heard for 5 minutes
 - Hold public input at night during the council meeting
 - Hold hearings on a Saturday
 - The most useful place to comment is at the scoping hearing as the document is being developed
 - Hold hearings in the most relevant places
 - Put comments received into perspective
 - Attendance is low unless an issue will effect their finances
 - People don't feel the regulators are listening to them
 - When emails are received at the council, have staff do an analyses of the comments in the emails and present that to the council
 - Instill that everyone's opinions matters regardless of where they live since the fish are everyone's resources
 - Give consideration of when the meetings are held in reference to the timing of the fishing season
- Outreach methods and new venues
 - Establish small working groups of different fishing sectors/types and have the scientists meet with them
 - Have NMFS review FWC successful outreach program
 - Media, TV programs would reach many
 - Meet at docks and have associations gather their members for those interactions
 - FWC uses video conferencing
 - There needs to be follow-up after the outreach to provide the results of the information gathered, more steady communication
 - Web casts
 - Establish a cable channel for fishery management
 - Provide information on the regulations and regulatory process to the fisherman at the point of sale of the license
 -
- Better use of comments provided
 - Provide an updated electronic program that would allow the fishermen to see the effect of selecting a size limit or closure
 - Have a Q&A session at the beginning of the public hearings
 - To not permit laptop use by regulators during the public comment period at meetings
 - Publish a response to the top 10 comments, how was that comment used, resulting regulations, or why it wasn't used
 - Have fishermen consider what the rules are that NMFS/FWC are governed by.
- Information timeliness
 - More real time data collection at time of off loading
 - Incorporate new data received up to the time of and at the review workshop

- Make manuals or guides
 - Provide a verbal update at the beginning of a meeting of what is going to be addressed
 - Use people with effective messaging skills or a liaison skilled in public speaking, don't put the burden on the scientists
 - Don't use acronyms, provide an acronym sheet
 - Provide an executive summary of one page to explain the meat of the document
 - Location of meetings being convenient for the attendees, particularly in the SEDAR process. This would improve the public's perception
- Building trust, more direct experience
 - Cooperative research collecting data on the water with fishermen working with researchers
 - Use of IPT (interdisciplinary planning team) which appears to be done outside of the public purview
 - In the PSA advise the changes in the documents
 - Trust and respect go together, all person's perceptions are their reality. The outreach programs must be improved to educate the public on the process and what's happening. FWC has done a lot of outreach and gained the public's trust
 - Perception is critical to fishery management
 - When the notices are provided to the public make sure that a clear precise idea is presented
 - Cooperative research will build trust, it will provide data to the regulators and provide more credibility in the process. The fishermen will understand the regulator's role better.
 - Present scientific data in a way that can be understood so persons will trust it more

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